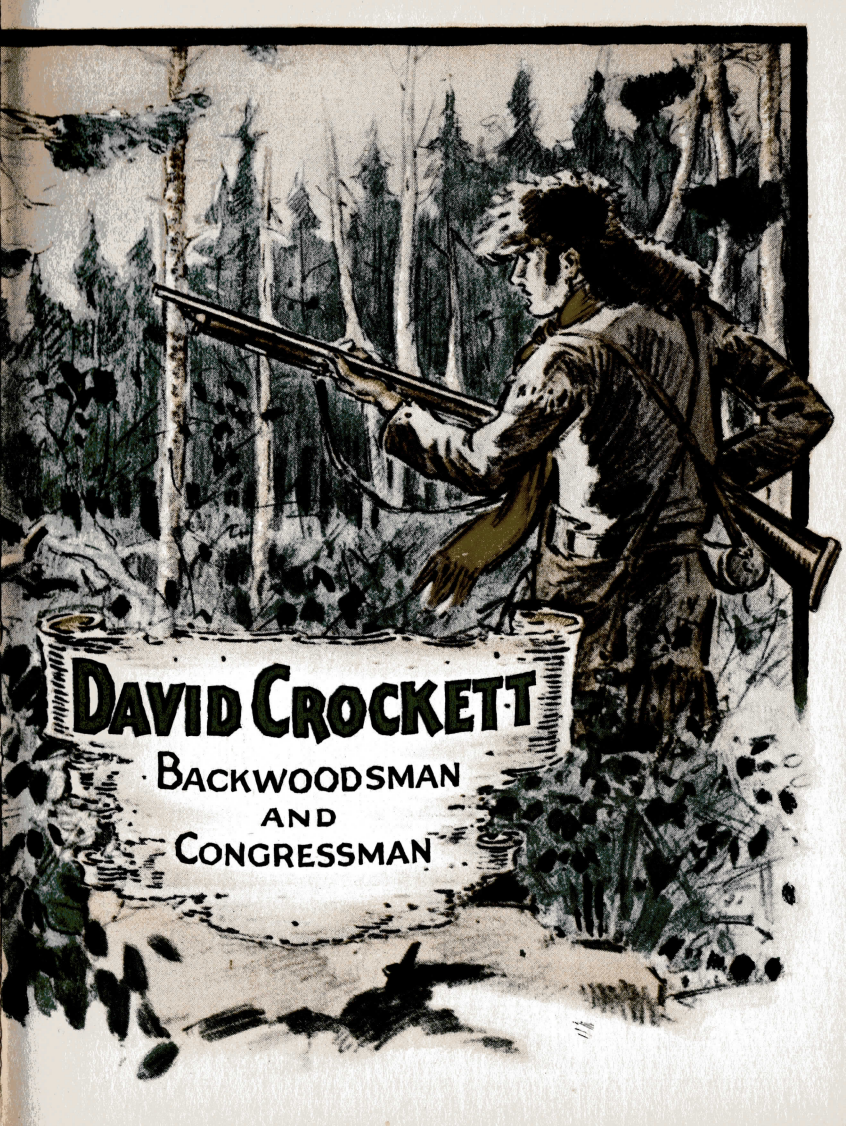

DAVID CROCKETT
BACKWOODSMAN
AND
CONGRESSMAN

DAVY CROCKETT WITH HIS RIFLE AND HIS DOGS

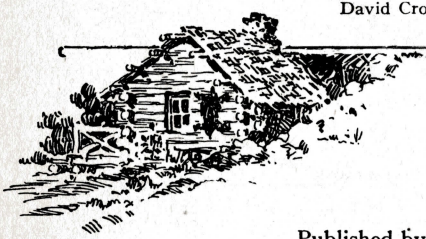
"Old Betsey is a mighty rough old piece, but I love her, for she and I have seen hard times. She seldom tells me a lie. If I hold her right, she always sends the ball where I tell her."

DAVID CROCKETT

Backwoodsman and Congressman

I leave this rule for others when I'm dead,
Be always sure you're right—**then go ahead!**

—From the title-page of
David Crockett's Autobiography.



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DAVID CROCKETT

"These crude, virile, tremendous, human men, product of the soil, born of the hard ground and the blue sky — how they do appeal, how they do grow, how they do succeed."

— Emerson Hough

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Davy goes to Congress.

DAVID CROCKETT

"BE always sure you're right, then go ahead." These words of Davy Crockett—his life motto—are known to the world almost as well as he is, and typify the straightforward, honest, fearless, quaintly humorous backwoodsman who well deserves a place in our gallery of American heroes.

For the greater part of his life he lived "far back in the back woods" where books and book learning had little place and a man's skill with his rifle was about all that mattered. But fate willed that Davy Crockett was to be more than a frontiersman and a bear hunter; that he was to go to Washington as a Congressman, where his quick wit and quaint way of expressing himself made up for his lack of education and culture, so that soon he became one of the most-talked-of men in the country, and when he visited the large cities in the East, people thronged to see the Congressman from the backwoods of Tennessee, who told such droll stories and was independent of party and politics, as long as he felt himself in the right.

Colonel Crockett was to "go ahead" even farther in the hearts of the people, as fate willed that he was to die a hero's death, with his name linked forever with the

immortal words, "Remember the Alamo." For when the Texans made their heroic stand for independence behind the walls of the Alamo, Davy Crockett was among them and died fighting and unafraid, one of the heroes of the Alamo.

A Child of the Wilderness

IN a rough little cabin in the wilderness of eastern Tennessee, which was then a part of Virginia, a boy was born on August 17, 1786. His parents named him David, but "Davy Crockett" is the name by which the world best knows him.

His grandparents had come from Ireland and settled in the wilds of the frontier country, moving west and ever westward until they and their family were massacred by the Indians. A son, John, escaped the deadly tomahawk and founded a pioneer family of his own. As Davy was the fifth son, with three sisters and a younger brother, we can well imagine that he grew up almost like a little savage, with no school, no church, no books and no friendly home influences.

The family moved frequently from one rough log hut to another; and we find them, when Davy was eight, keeping a tavern on the Holston River, an overnight stop for caravans traveling the trail from Virginia to the West. Glimpses of the outside world now fired the imagination of little Davy Crockett as he sat with wide-open eyes and drank in the stories that the teamsters told around the fire.

One day a Dutchman, driving a herd of cattle over the mountains to Virginia, bargained with Davy's father for the services of the twelve-year-old boy who could

help with the cattle. The money meant more to John Crockett than the safety of his son, and soon the little boy started out, with a lump in his throat, for, rough as it was, he loved his home. The long, four-hundred-mile journey on foot took between twenty and thirty days. Davy's employer was kind to him, and wanted to keep him in Virginia. The boy consented to stay, but when he saw some teamsters on their way back to his home country, his homesickness was too much for him and he ran away and joined their caravan. Slow mile after slow mile made Davy's homesickness even worse, and he decided that he would make better time if he pushed on by himself. Two hundred miles from home, the little lad, resolute and fearless, started out alone on the wilderness trail. Fortunately, after several days, he was picked up by a man who had an extra horse and took him within fifteen miles of his home.

Davy goes with the Drover,

Four Days at School

IT now happened that a school was opened in the neighborhood, and Davy entered the beginners' class, but after four days his schooling ended disastrously. Davy would not be bullied by one of the older boys, and beat him up on the way home from school. The next day he did not dare go back to school, knowing full well that a flogging awaited him there, but he

left home as usual and stayed in the woods until school was over. This went on for several days until the schoolmaster sent a note to Davy's father, inquiring as to the boy's absence. Now a worse punishment was in store for Davy at home, was even imminent, for his father cut a hickory stick and started for him. Davy ran for the woods, his father following; but the boy was too quick and hid in the bushes until his father went angrily home.

Rather than go home and encounter a whipping both there and at school, Davy decided to run away. He joined a drover who was taking cattle to Front Royal, Virginia, two hundred miles farther than Davy had tramped the previous spring. For the next two years Davy wandered from one job to another, earning about twenty-five cents a day. He could not bring himself to think of going home, for, as he said, "the promised whipping came right slap down on every thought of home."

But this fear gradually faded, and one night an older and a wiser Davy walked into the Crockett tavern. Needless to say, all thought of the whipping vanished in the midst of the rejoicing, and Davy afterwards admitted that he would rather have endured one hundred beatings than cause his mother and sisters so much worry.

Davy Earns His Independence

BY the law and custom of the land, Davy was bound to his father until he was twenty-one. John Crockett was greatly in debt, and purposed that Davy work out a certain debt of his, after which he might have his

freedom. The note was for thirty-six dollars, and Davy worked faithfully for six months and was then entitled to his independence, but here we find Davy doing something which shows that he was developing that sense of honesty and squareness which went with him through life. When he discovered that by working another six months, he could cancel a debt of forty dollars for his father, he willingly undertook it, saying nothing about his plan. At the end of half a year, when he presented the cancelled note to his father, the old man was distressed. "I cannot pay it," he said. "But you don't need to pay it," replied David. "It's yours. I worked to pay it off."

About this time Davy grew sensitive about his lack of education and wished that he knew how to read and write. He was sixteen, but not too old to start in at school again, and he arranged to work two days for his board and go to school the other four. This lasted for six months, and with difficulty Davy learned to write his name, to do a few simple sums and the simplest kind of reading.

Now he set out to find a wife, and soon won the heart of a fine Irish girl. With fifteen dollars of borrowed capital, the young couple settled in a log cabin. Game was plentiful; Davy was a crack shot, and his wife handy with the loom. The life of the western settler was very primitive, only a few degrees above that of the Indian. True to type, the Crocketts moved frequently; and in 1813, we find them with two sons living in what is now Franklin County, Tennessee.

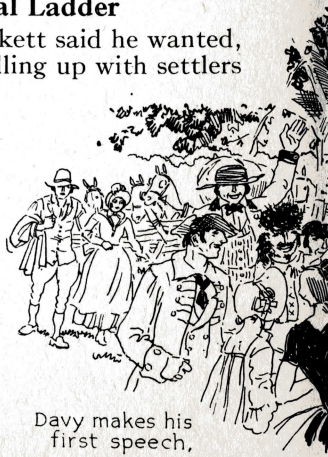
Fighting the Indians

TO their rude hut in the wilderness came the frightful story of the Indian massacre at Fort Mims in Alabama, which was the first warning that the Creeks were on the warpath and that the settlers must organize or their homes would be laid waste. Davy Crockett was among the first to enlist. A volunteer army of thirteen hundred joined General Jackson's regulars.

Accounted one of the best woodsmen and riflemen, Crockett was sent in charge of a scouting party and brought back news that the country was alive with Creek warriors. The fighting that followed was brutal and savage on both sides; and in April, 1814, the Creeks were seeking peace. During the campaign, Jackson's army was poorly provisioned, almost to starvation, and Davy Crockett's unerring rifle often came to the rescue and brought down a good meal for the hungry troops.

Starting up the Political Ladder

"MORE elbow room," Davy Crockett said he wanted, for gradually Tennessee was filling up with settlers and the hunting was not as it had been; so Davy moved his family eighty miles westward to what is now Giles County, Tennessee. His wife had died soon after his return from the Creek war, and Crockett had married a widow with two children. Soon he was appointed a magistrate, not that he knew anything about law, but in the backwoods, most disputes and crimes could be settled and punished by



Davy makes his first speech.

using good common sense, and this Davy had in abundance. At first the warrants he issued were verbal, but with the organization of the county, he had to issue written orders and keep records. With difficulty and great perseverance, Davy, who could barely write his name, mastered the art of writing.

He was next chosen a colonel in one of the state regiments. He was becoming more and more popular, and his inexhaustible fund of anecdotes and good humor never failed to please wherever he went. In 1821, he became a candidate for the legislature. This, he said, was "bran-fire new business" for him, and he afterwards frankly admitted that he did not know what the word legislature meant.

At a barbecue, held after a squirrel hunt, Davy made his first stump speech. His opponent, a good talker, thought that here the backwoods hunter would show up to poor advantage. Davy was trembling in his boots, and said that he "choked up as if his mouth had been crammed chock-full of dry mush," but he "determined to go ahead" and soon he had the crowd in roars of laughter at his funny stories and witticisms. At the election, Crockett received more than twice as many votes as did his opponent.

When a fellow member of the legislature remarked to David Crockett: "Well, Colonel, I suppose we shall have a radical change of the judiciary at the next session," Crockett replied: "Very likely, sir," and then disappeared as soon as possible, for he afterwards said:

"I was afraid some one would ask me what the judiciary was, and if I know'd, I wish I may be shot." Yet after Colonel Crockett took his seat in the legislature, it was not long before he was as well informed as most of his associates. He had a remarkable memory and never forgot anything that he once heard.

"The Member from the Canebrakes"

CIVILIZATION was pressing too hard upon Davy Crockett, and when the legislature adjourned, he set out westward to find a new home, where game would be plentiful. Through the pathless wilds he traveled nearly one hundred and fifty miles to the extreme western frontier of Tennessee, on the bank of the Obion River. Here he decided to build a cabin and bring his family. Their nearest neighbors were seven and fifteen miles away. It was a wild country, filled with bears, wolves, panthers, deer, and smaller game.

A stranger in this part of the country, Colonel Crockett soon became well known and well liked, so that he was sent to the legislature by a new constituency and was reëlected. So popular had he become that he was urged to run for Congress. "It was a step above my knowledge," Colonel Crockett asserted. The election turned on the new tariff law, and Crockett's party opposed it. His opponent maintained that the high price of cotton was the result of the tariff law. "I might as well have sung psalms over a dead horse," said Crockett, yet he lost the election by only two votes.

Bears and More Bears

NOTHING was so dear to Davy Crockett's heart as a bear-hunt. He would put on his coonskin cap, pick up his hunting-knife and his beloved gun, whose

name was "Old Betsey," and sound the horn for his dogs. Then he would be off into the woods, with his sons or perhaps a neighbor, where he never failed to bring down the bear, no matter how big or fierce. His stories of his numerous bear-hunts are exciting bits of reading. Two of his bears weighed over six hundred pounds, and once he crawled into a hole where a big bear had taken refuge; in the dark, he plunged his knife into the animal, trusting to luck that the thrust would kill, which it did.

Here is Crockett's description of another bear-hunt. "When the dogs overhauled him, he just rared up on his hind legs, and he boxed the dogs 'bout at a mighty rate. He hugged old Tiger and another till he dropped 'em nearly lifeless . . . 'Twas a mighty pretty fight—'twould have done anyone's soul good to see how they all rolled about. The first time they got him down, I socked my knife in the old bear."

He tells us that in one week he killed seventeen large bears, and brought down fifty-eight during the fall and winter, and in one month during the spring he killed forty-seven, with a total of one hundred and five bears in less than a year. Bear meat was regarded a great delicacy, and their shaggy skins were used for beds and bedding.

Davy had many bear stories,

A Congressman from the Backwoods

COLONEL Crockett was elected a Congressman in 1827, and the sturdy, keen-eyed backwoodsman, honest to the core, and as

unlearned as he was independent, left his bear hunting to go to Washington. "I am that same David Crockett, fresh from the backwoods, half horse, half alligator, a little touched with the snapping turtle . . . I can whip my weight in wildcats and if any gentleman pleases, for a ten-dollar bill, he can throw in a panther"—such was his introduction to a roomful of people. No wonder he made a stir in Washington, with his quaint ways and ready repartee. He was entertained at the White House by President John Quincy Adams.

There never was a more honest or conscientious Congressman than Colonel Crockett; he could not be bribed or menaced into voting for any measure that he considered wrong. "I will not consent to the party gee-whoa-haw," he said. When he was serving his second term, Andrew Jackson, the idol of Crockett's own state, became President. Until now, Crockett had usually agreed and coöperated with the Jackson party. Now he felt that several of Jackson's measures were wrong; he voted against the Indian bill, and brought upon himself the censure of his constituency, so that he was defeated in the next election. "If they won't elect me with my opinions, I can't help it," said Crockett.

Bear-hunting had lost its thrill for the defeated Congressman, and he set about writing the story of his life and working for the next election. The book, published in 1834, is, as Crockett says in the introduction, "a plain, honest, home-spun account" of his life. He said that he "despised the way of spelling contrary to nature," and the book is filled with his own manner of spelling and speaking.

In 1833, Crockett defeated the Jackson forces and returned to Congress. He was very popular among those who opposed Old Hickory's high-handed adminis-

tration. Davy was known as "the honest Congressman." He even dreamed that he might some day be President.

A National Figure

IN Baltimore, on April 25, 1834, a sandy-haired, large-framed man, dressed in homespun, boarded a train for the first time in his life. It was Davy Crockett, starting upon his famous tour of the Eastern cities. He said that the train was "a clean, new sight" to him and the engine "wheezed like it had the tizzick." His train-ride lasted for only seventeen miles, and the rest of the journey was by boat and stagecoach.

Crowds of cheering, enthusiastic people greeted him everywhere, curious to see the renowned Congressman from the backwoods. He was fêted and dined, cheered and flattered; his speeches were quainter and more appealing than ever. "I thought I would rather be in the wilderness, with my gun and my dogs, than to be attracting all this fuss," he said, when he had to address a crowd of over five thousand in Philadelphia. Here he was presented with a wonderful rifle, which took the place of "Old Betsey," and was so soon to go to the defense of the Alamo.

New York, which he called a "bulger of a place," welcomed him as only New York can—with the wildest enthusiasm. In Jersey City he attended a shooting-match and proved that his skill as a marksman was no myth. Historic Boston

Davy starts on his trip

made a great impression upon him. He visited several other cities in New England, then back to Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, where he took a boat down the Ohio, stopping at Wheeling, Cincinnati and Louisville, before he reached his little cabin in Tennessee.

He had tasted of the flattery and praise of a nation, he had suddenly awakened to find himself famous; now he was to find that this popularity counted for nothing in the face of the political machine, in his own state, working against him because of his opposition to President Jackson. His defeat at the polls, when running for Congress for the fourth time, was a bitter disappointment, so bitter and rankling that he must do something desperate. Texas was fighting for her independence. He would go there!

Fighting for the Lone Star State

"I have a new row to hoe, a long and rough one, but come what will, I'll go ahead."—*David Crockett.*

IN 1833, the American settlers in Texas, numbering about 20,000, decided to strike for independence and separate from the Mexican state of Coahuila. They drew up a State Constitution and organized with Henry Smith as governor and Sam Houston, commander in chief. They succeeded on December 10, 1835, in capturing San Antonio and driving the Mexican army, headed by General Santa Anna, out of Texas. In the outskirts of the picturesque old town of San Antonio, stood the Alamo, an old Spanish mission building, converted into a fortress with a garrison of about one hundred and fifty Texans, commanded by Colonel William B. Travis. Numbered among his men, was the brave Colonel James Bowie, after whom the "bowie knife" was named.

To the Alamo, in February, came Colonel Crockett, accompanied by four of the most ill-assorted men one can imagine, whom he had picked up along the way—a gambler, nicknamed by Crockett, "Thimblerig," a bee-hunter, a pirate and an Indian.* They were more than welcome, for Santa Anna, mad for vengeance, was marching an army of Mexicans toward the Alamo. Colonel Travis assembled his little band of one hundred and eighty-three within the Alamo, hoisted the Lone-Star Flag of Texas, and on February 23, 1836, when Santa Anna demanded an unconditional surrender or death to everyone, he answered with a cannon shot.

"Remember the Alamo"

THERE are varying stories of the siege that followed. No one knows the real story, for not one of the brave defenders survived. For eleven days the Texans, outnumbered twenty to one, held the Alamo. All hope of reinforcement had vanished. The last entry in Davy Crockett's alleged diary reads:

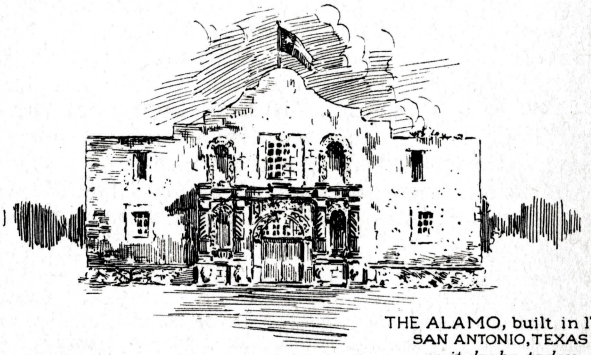
"March 5—Pop, pop, pop! Bom, bom, bom, throughout the day. No time for memorandums now. Go ahead. Liberty and independence forever!"

On March 6, the final assault came. The Mexicans, four thousand in number, came pouring over the walls,

*_Note_: The story of the adventures of these five as they traveled across the prairie to Texas has been published as a supplement to Crockett's autobiography and is accredited to his pen. It is entertaining and thrilling, but believed to be so full of discrepancies that it is usually considered fictitious and not written by Crockett. His four companions, named above, may also have been creatures of the imagination. It is also quite unlikely that Crockett kept a diary during the siege of the Alamo, as many assert that he did, or that the diary would have been saved in the midst of such confusion.

their band playing the Dequelo, which means no quarter. Never was a battle fought with more fury or more desperate courage. The Texans had no time to reload their guns, but used them as clubs as the Mexicans swarmed in. Of the one hundred and eighty-three* defenders of the Alamo, not one was left alive within those smoking walls.

We do not know exactly how Davy Crockett died. Some think that he was among the last six survivors, that they surrendered and were taken before Santa Anna, who ordered that they be killed at once. But it is more probable that the brave woodsman died with his face to the foe, undaunted and resolute,—on his lips, the words—"Go Ahead."



THE ALAMO, built in 1744
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS
as it looks today

*This number varies from 150 to 187.

THE DESPERATE DEFENSE OF THE ALAMO

"Thermopylæ had three messengers of defeat;
the Alamo had not one."

Presented by

John Hancock
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